



Who's watching out for you?

When you go to sleep tonight, rest a little easier knowing that your public health agencies are there for you...even while you sleep.

Everyone is aware that police, firefighters and hospital staff work around the clock, but did you know your state health department and local public health agencies are also available for emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week? State and local public health agencies are working together to protect Missouri's citizens during a public health emergency or terrorist attack.... even while you sleep. Their job is to watch out for the public's health and well-being and to respond quickly to potential biological, chemical or nuclear emergencies, as well as emerging infectious diseases.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services operates a Department Situation Room 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A duty officer is working around-the-clock and serves as the coordination point for all public health responses to emergencies, both natural and deliberate.

Disease investigators are available in each region of the state and provide 24-hours a day, seven days per week coverage for public health emergencies and infectious diseases. A public health team can go on-site to investigate any suspicious illness or disease within an hour of its reporting.

Hospitals, laboratories and public health agencies have joined forces to improve the detection of possible conditions or diseases that could indicate a possible bioterrorism or emergency event. A new hospital tracking system detects possible outbreaks by monitoring the number of admissions and ambulance diversions at hospitals.

The State Public Health Laboratory initiated a powerful DNA fingerprinting system that provides rapid identification of a wide variety of infectious diseases including critical bioterrorism agents. This significantly reduces the time it takes to identify critical agents from three days to two to four hours. In addition, a statewide courier service now ensures that specimens from every county arrive at the laboratory each morning before it opens for business.

This extra protection for Missouri's residents was made possible through federal funding to improve the state's ability to respond to a terrorist attack, outbreaks of infection and public health threats and emergencies.

So tonight when you go to bed, remember that your public health agencies are watching out for you. For more information, contact your local health department or the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services at 573-751-6062 or at www.dhss.mo.gov.

Ready in 3 is an emergency-preparedness program for Missouri. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services sponsors the program. **Ready in 3** aims to help residents and communities prepare for many types of emergencies from tornadoes to terrorism. For more information, visit www.dhss.mo.gov.